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Profile and working expectations of Spanish physical education university students

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Abstract

The purpose of this pilot study was to analyze and compare the profile of students who were doing a Physical Education (PE) related university degree in the north of Spain. A questionnaire about the profile and work expectations was distributed among 178 Higher Degree (HD) and 88 Bachelor Degree (BD) students. Results showed that a liking for sport was the fundamental reason why students chose a PE-related degree. Students doing HD and BD degrees in PE have similar profiles, however only half of BD students wish to be a teacher. Work expectations do not match the student's academic interest.

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Keywords: Physical education; university students; subject choice; academic profile; Spain.

1. Introduction

Lately, there has been much criticism of how PE teachers are prepared to teach (O'Bryant, O'Sullivan, & Raudensky, 2000), and indeed, very little is known about what forms of professional development PE teachers have undertaken in their careers or about their views on their professional learning requirements (Armourand & Yelling, 2004). In this regard, Lawson (1983) suggested that if we had a better understanding of who our recruits were and what their beliefs are about physical education, we may be able to better design a more robust teacher education program. Although several studies have sought to identify reasons the why people wish to become physical education teachers, (Macdonald, Kirk, & Braiuka, 1999; Spittle, Jackson, & Casey, 2009), few of them have tried to analyze and compare the profile of the students who are doing PE-related university degrees, and generally it is unknown if the offered curriculum matches the students' initial expectations.

In Spain, university degrees in Physical Education are organized into two categories: higher degree "HD" (licenciatura) and bachelor's degree "BD" (diplomatura). A Higher Degree in Physical Activity and Sport Sciences offers the possibility to specialize as a high school PE teacher (12-17 years) and to obtain specific training in the fields of health, recreation and high performance training as well as management and sports marketing. A Bachelor's Degree in Specialized Physical Education Teaching offers mainly the possibility to specialize as a primary school PE teacher (6-11 years) and to acquire basic training in the fields of health and sports recreation.

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Given the lack of studies about the profile of PE students carried out in Spain, and bearing in mind the different specializations that PE-related degrees are currently offering, we aimed to analyze and compare the profile of students who are doing a PE-related university degree in the north of Spain. Therefore, our main objective is to identify their characteristics, to describe their working expectations and to find out if getting a job as a PE teacher is still the main goal of this population.

2. Methods

2.1. Subjects

The participants were 346 students enrolled in a 4-year HD or 3- year BD at the Faculty of Education and Sports Sciences of University of Vigo. To be eligible for the study, subjects had to be at least 17 years old and expecting to develop their professional future in a PE-related job. Those students who had already a remunerated job or who had accessed the last course of any of the two degrees through a transfer of their student record were excluded.

2.2. Research Design and Implementation

A questionnaire was used to obtain information about the students' Access Profile, Working Situation, Job Expectations, and Ideal Working Situation. Besides, those students who were doing their last year in either degree were asked to express their opinion on the academic training they had so far received. The questionnaire was filled in during the last part of the first four-month term of the academic year 2003/2004. Participants received a plain language statement that informed them that participation was voluntary, that all the questions had to be honestly answered and that their consent was implied by the return of the completed questionnaire.

With the purpose of comparing only the profile of those students whose job interests were the same but who were studying different degrees, the result of the questionnaires carried out by students who wished to specialize in the health care field are not shown in this study, since that curricular itinerary is only offered in the HD. Thus, it was compared the profile of HD and BD students who were enrolled in Teaching or Sport-Recreational academic itineraries.

2.3. Statistical Analysis

The U Mann-Whitney test was used to assess significant differences ($p < 0.005$). The data was analyzed using SPSS software version 16.0 (SPSS Inc.)

3. Results

Out of 346 questionnaires initially picked up, 266 were analyzed (178 HD and 88 BD), since the rest of them came from students who were doing a health related itinerary. The obtained results can be observed in Table 1. Survey respondents ranged in age from 17 to 38 years, with an average age of 20.3 ± 2 years for BD and of 21.5 ± 2.8 years for HD. Over 13% of BD students and almost 34% of HD students had previously studied another university degree. Within this last group, around 25% claimed to have completed said studies.

Regarding the main reasons why the polled students decided to do BD or HD it seems that more than 70% of the students of both degrees alleged a liking for sport as the main reason for enrolling, while less than 10% showed a liking for teaching as the main interest. When asked about the kind of job they would like to be carrying out in the future, around 75.4% of BD students and 51.2% of HD students who were doing the teaching curricular itinerary expressed a wish to work as PE teachers. However, when asked about the actual job they thought they would end up having, only 65% of them expected to be working as a teacher in the future. The health-related working field was chosen by 38% of HD students.

When analyzing the desirable working status, it seems that employee (46%) and civil servant (27%) were the preferred working categories among BD students while HD students chose freelancer (50%) and civil servant (32%). Regarding the way last-year students of both degrees perceived the academic training they have received according to their chosen specialization, it must be noted that the lack of theoretical basics about sport and recreational aspects was pointed out by more than 35% of BD and almost 60% of HD students. The analysis of the data showed

significant differences between groups in entry age, being older in the HD group (19.4 ± 1.4 vs. 20.3 ± 2.9 years), and in preferences regarding working status, desirable job situation and opinion on received academic training.

Table 1. Profile and working expectations of the sample.

		BD (3 years) n=88	HD (4 years) n=178	t Student t	
				t	Sig 1
Age	Entry age (years)	19.4± 1.4	20.3± 1.9	- 1.90	0.00 ^{**}
	Mean age (years)	20.3 ±2.	21.56± 1.8	- 1.01	0.00 ^{**}
				U Mann-Whitney	
				Z	Sig 1
Previous academic training	University studies	13.6% (0.0%)*	33.7% (25.1%)*	-3.68 (-3.62)*	0.001** (0.001**)
Reasons for registering	Easiness to find a job	13.6%	18.3%		
	Liking for sport	77.3%	73.1%	- 1.05	0.516
	Liking for teaching	9.1%	8.6%		
Preferred working category	Employee	45.9%	17.4%		
	Freelancer	26.5%	50.1%	- 1.91	0.001 ^{**}
	Civil servant	27.6%	32.5%		
Field you prefer/ foresee to be working in. [†] (n=188)	Teaching	75.4%/ 5.5%	51.2%/6 1.4%		
	Sport-recreational	9.1%/16%	18.9%/20.5%	-4.77/-4.83	0.001**/(0.001**)
	Health	13.1%/21%	38.8%/20.9%		
	Others	0.4%/0.9%	3.1%/1%		
What kind of fundamentals are lacking in the studies you are doing?	Technical-Recreational	59%	35.8%		
	Psycho-socio-pedagogical	14.3%	21.1%		
	Bio-medics	5.3%	26.4%	- 1.56	0.001 ^{**}
	Methodological	21.4%	16.7%		

* Percentage of pupils who have finished their studies. ** Sig≤0,005

[†] Answer offered only by those BD and HD students who were doing a teaching itinerary.

4. Discussion

In several countries entry to university courses in the physical activity field is highly competitive (Macdonald et al., 1999) and Spain is not an exception. From the findings of our study it can be observed that over 30% of HD students had started other university degrees and 25% of them had actually finished those studies. A possible reason for this is the fact that those people who cannot enrol on the HD directly start doing the BD, which is easier to enter, and then gain access to HD through a complementary course. It is also very frequent for those students who cannot enter HD at the first attempt to start some other studies while they wait for a new opportunity. This determination to end up enrolling on this degree agrees with previous findings which proved that PE students did not view PE programs' entrance requirements as a barrier to their aspirations (Dodds, Placek, Doolittle, Pinkham, Ratliffe, & Portman, 1991).

The results of our study show that a liking for sport was the main reason why both BD and HD students decided to enrol on a PE related university degree. In this regard, it must be noted that different studies have explained the interest to study a degree in PE based on a process of "socialization into and via sport" which implies that positive experiences acquired during the sport practice become an important factor to choose a particular kind or university studies (Dewar & Lawson, 1984; Dodds et al., 1991; Hutchinson & Buschner, 1996).

In the past, physical education major generally prepared people for teaching and coaching, however physical education recruits can now specialize in a variety of occupations. Our research shows that although in both degrees teaching was the preferred working option for those who had chosen that curricular itinerary, only 65% of them expected to be working as a teacher in the future. This could be due to the fact that getting a job as a PE teacher in

Spain is rather difficult due to the demanding entrance requirements and the decreasing number of available positions every year. It is worth to mention that over 38% of HD students who were doing this itinerary seemed to be willing to work in health-related jobs. This is not entirely a surprising fact since it has been observed that it is possible for university students to change their orientations and working expectations as they successfully complete their program of study (Senf, Campos, & Kutob, 2003). Indeed, in the field of physical activity it has been observed that a different curriculum to that expected by students, could impact on them in a significant way when they already have preconceived ideas about what is expected from the subject (MacPhail, 2002).

As far as the preferred working category is concerned, it has been pointed out that some of the main attractors to develop a career in the PE are job security and a good income (Lortie, 1975; O'Bryant et al., 2000). If this was so, most of the polled students would have chosen civil service as their working preference, which is not reflected in our study. In fact, no option stands out clearly above the others, with the exception of freelancer in the HD students group. Thus, it seems that neither job status nor job security (benefits which are typical of civil service in Spain) represented a common priority in any group, as other authors have observed (Belka, Lawson, & Lipnickey, 1991).

Although there are plenty of stereotypes regarding PE students' academic ability, our results detected that last-year students themselves did not see great weaknesses in their training, except in those aspects regarding both practical and theoretical sport-recreational contents, which could be a consequence of an ill-structured plan of studies and the fact that PE degrees have not been available in Spain until recently. Finally, hardly any significant differences were observed between the profiles of both groups of students, but this point needs to be confirmed by future studies.

It must be noted that the ability to generalize the results and implications of our findings to other settings is limited, since several weak points have been detected. First, the data of the study comes from those students who attended their classes regularly therefore it does not comply adequately with the typical PE student profile. On the other hand, there are other faculties which offer PE degrees in the north of Spain, so possible differences between those students and the interviewees could exist. Furthermore, although this study was not approached through the framework of socialization, some important data, such as socio-economic family situation, age at which PE studies were chosen, or more specific discrimination between career attractors and facilitators is missing. Therefore, although this study may contribute with some information about PE university students' profile, more and better research in this regard is needed.

5. Conclusion

University degrees in Physical Education have experienced a great deal of change during the last years in such a way that qualifying as a PE teacher is not their main objective anymore but also specializing in new domains like health, training or recreation. In recent years various studies have examined the profile and expectations of PE students from different countries, but, to the authors' knowledge there is hardly any information about the profile of those students who register in PE-related university degrees in Spain. From our findings, it seems that both BD and HD students have similar characteristics and expectations, and it is worth to mention that, for some of them, doing BD is just a way to access HD. Although the results of our study lend force to the idea that a liking for sport is still the fundamental reason why students choose a PE-related degree, most of them would like to become a PE teacher. Apparently, and in spite of the fact that PE degrees currently offer different specializations, being able to qualify for teaching is still the reason why students enrol in PE-related degrees. However it seems that work expectations do not match the student's academic interest. This is undoubtedly due to two fundamental reasons. First, the possibility to make a living as a teacher in Spain generally depends on sitting a competitive examination where academic training is not necessarily the key factor to success and where opportunities constantly dwindle, since fewer and fewer positions are offered every year. On the other hand, recreational and sports health related jobs are very recent and they lack the necessary professional development to be properly remunerated occupations. Regarding received academic training, according to last year students of both degrees, there is a need for improvement in both practical and theoretical sport-recreational contents in order to strengthen the students' academic skills.

In closing, a liking for sport and the prospect of becoming a teacher seem to be the fundamental reasons for Spanish students to enrol in a PE degree. A reformation of work legislation and a change in the way to access the profession of PE teacher are necessary so that the new generations may be able to accomplish their working expectations.

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